United States Department of Agriculture **Forest Service** **Idaho Panhandle National Forests**

Sandpoint Ranger District
1500 Highway No. 2 Suite 110
Sandpoint, ID 83864-9509
(208)263-5111

File Code: 1950 - NEPA

Date: October 9, 2003

Reference: Proposed Chloride Bush Project

Hello,

We are in the early planning stages of the Chloride Bush Ecosystem Restoration Project. This project responds to a continuing ecosystem health problem in the Gold Creek watershed near Lakeview, Idaho. It will complement other ongoing and planned restoration work in the area including mine reclamation activities and the West Gold Ecosystem Restoration Project, which many of you may be aware of. If you spend time or are interested in the Gold Creek watershed, please read this entire packet of information carefully. This notice and future information about this project is also available on the web at: *www.fs.fed.us/ipnf/eco/manage/nepa/index.html*.

A Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement was sent to the Federal Register the week of October 20 and we anticipate it to be published the following week. **We would like to receive your comments on our proposal by December 1, 2003** so that we can consider them early in our planning process; however, we will still accept comments that arrive after that date. Once we receive comments, we will prepare a Draft Environmental Impact Statement that will present and analyze alternatives to our proposal. When that is published, you will have a second opportunity to comment, providing feedback on the Draft. After considering a second round of comments, a Final Environmental Impact Statement will be prepared, and a decision will be issued.

Please review the enclosed information. I encourage you to use the enclosed comment form, send an e-mail, call, or visit. Give your comments to:

A.J. Helgenberg, Chloride Bush Project Leader
Sandpoint Ranger District
1500 Hwy 2, Suite 110
Sandpoint, ID 83864
Phone: 208-265-6665
E-mail: ajhelgenberg@fs.fed.us

Thank you for your time and interest in this project.

Sincerely,

RICHARD P. KRAMER
District Ranger

Enclosures

CHLORIDE BUSH PROJECT PROPOSAL
OCTOBER 2003

PROJECT LOCATION

The Chloride Bush Project is located at the south end of Lake Pend Oreille near the community of Lakeview, Idaho. The planning area encompasses 9,413 acres in the Chloride Gulch, Kickbush Gulch, Upper Gold Creek and Lower Gold Creek subwatersheds of the 14,035 acre Gold Creek Watershed. Refer to the attached maps for the exact location of the project area and proposed actions.

WHY ARE WE CONSIDERING THIS AREA

In 1999, staff at the Sandpoint Ranger District began work on an ecosystem assessment of the Gold Creek Watershed. The Gold Creek Watershed Assessment resulted in some ecosystem restoration and management recommendations for the entire Gold Creek drainage. Key recommendations include reclamation and cleanup of old mine sites in the Gold Creek and Chloride Gulch drainages, aquatic restoration of streams damaged by mining waste and road erosion, restoration of forest habitats that are deteriorating throughout the watershed, repairing or removing roads that pose risks to watersheds and wildlife, and managing motorized recreation.

The Chloride Bush Project is just one of the high priority restoration projects recommended as a result of the watershed assessment. Other restoration work has already occurred, and more will be happening in the near future (refer to the section on "Other Restoration Work in the Gold Creek Watershed" later in this document).

PROJECT AREA CONDITIONS

Conclusions from the watershed assessment relating to the Chloride Bush Project include:

- The United States Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed the Gold Creek watershed as critical habitat for the recovery of bull trout populations in accordance with the Endangered Species Act. The Lake Pend Oreille Bull Trout Problem Assessment (Panhandle Bull Trout Technical Advisory Team, 1998) identified Gold Creek as the third highest priority for watershed restoration because of its high quality spawning habitat.

- Aquatic habitat has been significantly degraded by past mining operations. Tremendous amounts of waste rock and tailings were deposited directly into the channels of both Chloride Gulch and Gold Creek. Erosion and channelization of these mining wastes is contributing excess bedload, sediment and toxic heavy metals to these channels.

- Mine reclamation and associated stream channel restoration is ongoing. These activities fall under the laws and regulations of the CERCLA (Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act) of 1980. CERCLA has different procedural requirements from the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which is the law that typically guides our analysis of project proposals. If you want to receive information on mine cleanup, please note it with your comments.

- Total road density, riparian road density and road density on sensitive landtypes are high, particularly in the Chloride Gulch and Upper Gold Creek drainages. Many of these roads are chronic sediment sources, and some have the potential to deliver large amounts of sediment via mass failures. These roads also

cause increased peak stream flows by intercepting, concentrating, and diverting water from its natural path.

- Trail 113 is a motorized trail that encroaches upon the stream in Kick Bush Gulch for about 2 miles and crosses the channel numerous times. At each crossing, the stream banks are eroding and the trail is in poor condition. As the trail winds up the hill away from the stream it is steep in many places, and frequent use is removing vegetation and accelerating surface erosion.

- Dry sites in the project area historically supported stands containing large, open-grown ponderosa pine, western larch and Douglas-fir. These stand structures were maintained by short-interval, underburning fires and have become markedly different with the elimination of fire. Dense, homogeneous stands dominated by Douglas-fir and grand fir now occupy many dry sites. These changes have caused increased insect and disease activity, and have increased the likelihood of a catastrophic fire on sites that historically experienced non-lethal underburns.

- Moister sites in the project area historically supported stands that had a high percentage of white pine and larch. Today, successful fire suppression and the devastating impact of white pine blister rust have led to a precipitous decline of these species. Douglas-fir and grand fir, species very susceptible to insect attacks and root disease, are now the dominant species on most moist sites. As a result, insects and disease are causing mortality far beyond historic levels.

- Changes in forest composition and structure precipitated by insects, diseases and fire suppression are causing key elements of wildlife habitat to be degraded and lost. Loss of low-density, large-diameter ponderosa pine forests has reduced the amount of habitat suitable for flammulated owls, white-headed woodpeckers and other dry site-dependent species. A reduction in the amount of long-lived, early seral tree species on the landscape has affected the long-term stability and persistence of quality snag habitat for woodpeckers, songbirds, owls and mammals. Lack of fire has reduced both the quantity and quality of forage available to deer and elk.

- Changes in the forest have also increased the risk of a severe, uncharacteristic wildfire. This type of fire would likely impact watershed function, aquatic habitat, wildlife habitat and neighboring private lands in the watershed.

- Off-road vehicle use is increasing, and there is demand to provide more routes for motorized recreation.

These conclusions helped to shape the objectives of the Chloride Bush Project, shown below as the "Purpose and Need."

Purpose and Need

Improve the health and productivity of aquatic and terrestrial habitats by:

- Reducing road densities and sediment risks from roads and trails.
- Restoring desired forest cover, structure, pattern and species composition across the landscape where they are outside of natural or accepted ranges.
- Maintaining stands where desired species are being crowded out, or are declining from competition.
- Promoting the long-term persistence and stability of wildlife habitat diversity.

Provide for human uses and values by:

- Reducing hazardous fuels and managing for forest structure and fuel conditions that would facilitate suppression of wildfire.
- Managing motorized recreation opportunities.
- Producing timber as a by-product of ecosystem restoration and maintenance.

PROPOSED ACTION

To achieve the objectives stated in the purpose and need we are proposing the following activities:
(Refer to attached maps for location of activities)

Improve the health of aquatic habitats by:

- **Decommissioning** 10.4 miles of existing roads by removing all stream crossings and recontouring the entire road prism. Approximately 4.8 miles of these roads are currently closed to motorized access or are overgrown. This action would be focused in the Upper Gold Creek and Chloride Gulch drainages. Some roads would be decommissioned after project use. The Forest Service would work with adjacent landowners to assure reasonable access to private property is maintained.

- **Decommissioning** 7.1 miles of overgrown**,** undrivable roads. Most of these roads don't present resource risks in their current state. They would simply be removed from transportation system maps and left to continue revegetating. In some cases, resource risks may warrant stream crossing removal and partial recontouring. The Forest Service would work with private landowners to address resource risks from these roads on private land, and to identify roads that provide reasonable access to private land. Roads providing reasonable access would be considered for classification.

- **Upgrading** 4.8 miles of road to alleviate erosion and sediment problems by improving drainage structures and potentially relocating portions of road. We would work with private land owners to address sections on private land.

- **Storing** approximately 5.0 miles of a currently gated road that has been identified as needed for future management. Stream crossings and unstable fill slopes will be removed and recontoured, self-maintaining cross ditches will be installed, and the road will remain closed to motorized use.

Manage motorized recreation opportunities by:

- **Improving** Kick Bush Trail #113 by upgrading crossings and relocating portions. This action is being proposed in the Packsaddle Inventoried Roadless Area.

- **Converting** approximately 3.3 miles of road to a motorized trail for vehicles < 50" wide.

Restore and maintain desired forest cover while improving the persistence and stability of wildlife habitat diversity and promoting fuel conditions that would facilitate wildfire suppression by:

- **Treating Vegetation** on about 2,642 acres of the 9,413-acre project area (see attached map). Treatments are designed to trend the project area forests towards conditions historically created by low-intensity (non-lethal) and mixed-severity fires, rather than lethal (stand-replacing) fires. Three main types of vegetation treatment are proposed:

    1) **Selective Cutting (860 Acres):** These techniques would be used in areas where there is the opportunity to maintain or enhance the growth of larch (**Larch Improvement: 369 Acres**), ponderosa pine (**PP Improvement: 423 Acres**), or Douglas-fir (**Thin: 68 Acres**). Trees would be removed to provide growing space for residual trees and to reduce fuel ladders. Selectively cut areas would generally appear to have be been thinned.

2) **Regeneration Cutting (1,637 Acres):** This treatment would be used to remove trees in areas where widespread mortality is being caused by insects and/or diseases. Generally, less than 30% of these areas would remain covered by mature trees. The size of open areas would range from approximately 5 acres to several hundred acres. Open areas would not be devoid of trees. Trees would be retained in a clumpy, irregular spacing mimicking natural disturbances caused by mixed severity fires. Within regeneration areas, priority would be given to retaining cedar-dominated riparian areas and the largest, healthy larch, ponderosa pine and white pine. Following harvest, openings created in regenerated areas would be burned and reforested with white pine, western larch and ponderosa pine.

3) **Prescribed Burning (2,278 Acres):** Fuels would be burned under controlled conditions. This would allow the fire to be confined to a predetermined area and to produce desired effects. Prescribed fire would be used to maintain existing structures (old growth ponderosa pine stands and shrubfields), reduce hazardous fuels, improve forage for deer and elk, and to prepare sites for planting. On many sites, slashing of shade tolerant, insect and disease susceptible, submerchantable (small) trees would occur prior to burning.

- **Constructing** several short, temporary roads (totaling approximately 1.8 miles) to facilitate vegetation management activities. These roads would be fully decommissioned after use.

OTHER RESTORATION WORK IN THE GOLD CREEK WATERSHED

The Chloride Bush Project is only part of our ecosystem assessment-driven approach to restoring ecological integrity to the Gold Creek Watershed. A variety of restoration activities have occurred, or are planned for the Gold Creek Watershed:

- A major effort is underway to clean up abandoned mine sites. A waste repository has been constructed, and the first phase of mine reclamation has been completed at the Idaho Lakeview Mine. $300,000 has been spent to date, and mine cleanup is planned to continue over the next several years with efforts focusing on the Conjecture, Weber and Keep Cool mines.

- Repairs to the Kickbush slide, an area of chronic slide activity on road 278 near Kick Bush Gulch were completed in the Spring of 2003 at a cost of $250,000.

- Planning for the West Gold Project has been completed. This project focuses on terrestrial and aquatic habitat restoration with 1,338 acres of vegetative treatments, 2.4 miles of road decommissioning and 27.9 miles of road maintenance and in the West Gold drainage of Gold Creek.

These projects, and other past, present or reasonably foreseeable future actions will be considered in the cumulative effects analysis for the Chloride Bush Project.

IDENTIFIED ISSUES

Preliminary issues that have been identified by the Forest Service interdisciplinary team in the development of this proposal include:

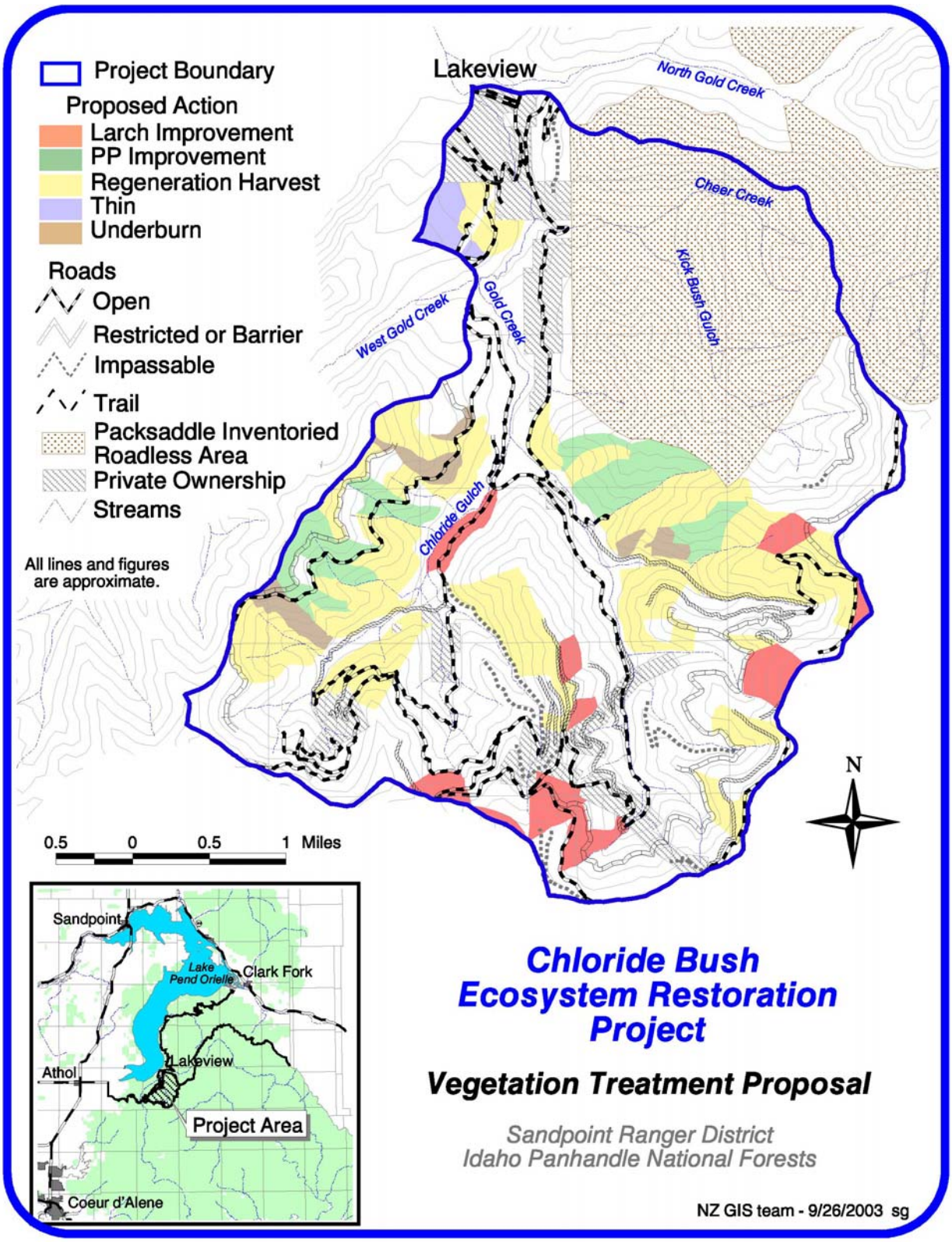
- The effects of roads and road construction on sediment, water yield, water quality, fish habitat, noxious weed spread, motorized access, and wildlife security.
- The effects of logging and related activities on water yield, fish and wildlife habitat, wildlife security and sensitive plant species.
- The effects of road decommissioning on private land access, ability to manage forest vegetation, and ability to suppress fires.

GIVE US YOUR COMMENTS

After reviewing this information, please take time to give us your feedback on our proposal. Use the enclosed form, call, or send us a message on the computer. We will be considering your comments to develop alternatives, design resource protection measures, and analyze the potential effects of these actions in a Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Submit your comments to:

A.J. Helgenberg, Chloride Bush Project Leader
Sandpoint Ranger District
1500 Hwy 2, Suite 110
Sandpoint, ID 83864
Phone: 208-265-6643
E-mail: ajhelgenberg@fs.fed.us

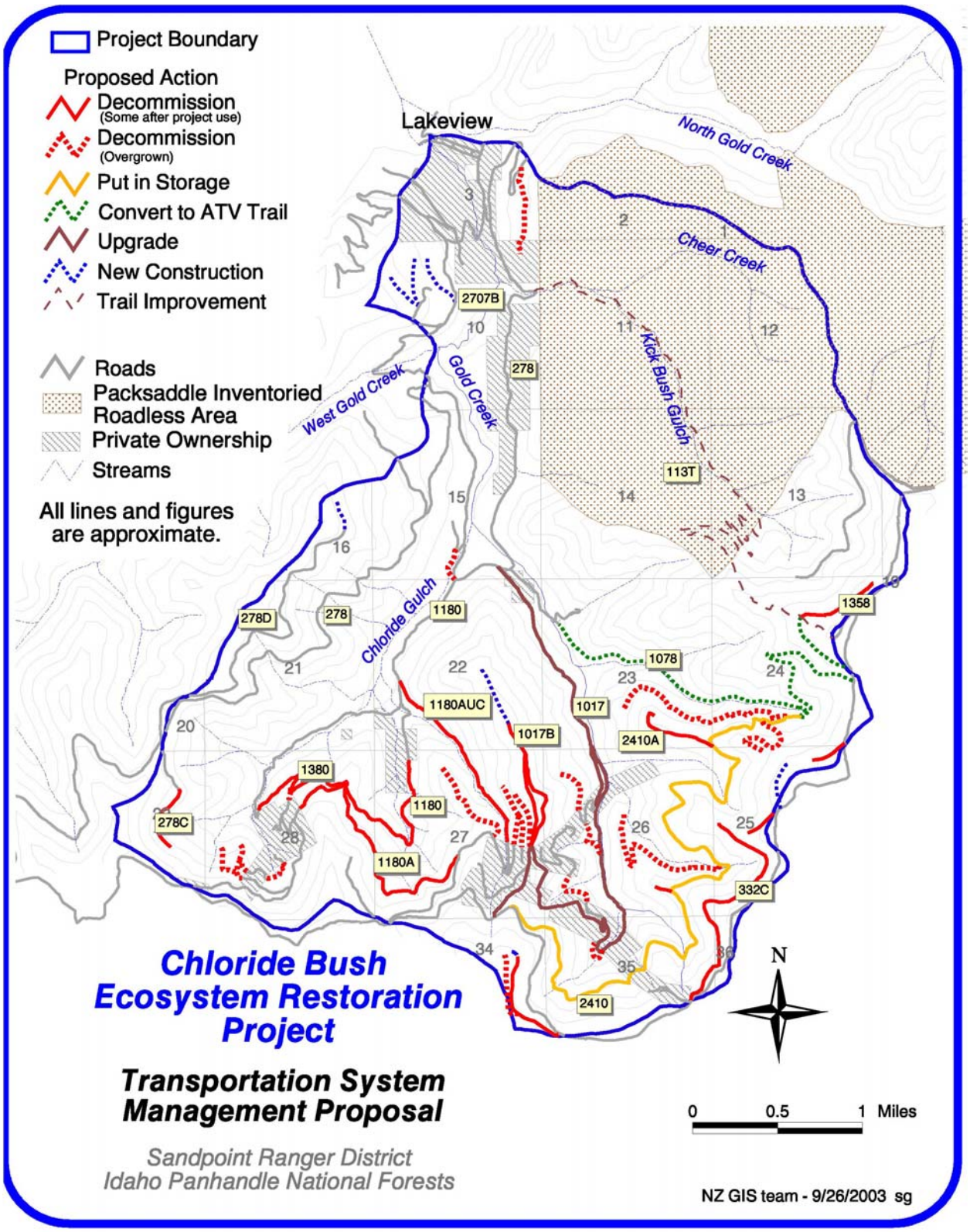


Chloride Bush Ecosystem Restoration Project

Vegetation Treatment Proposal

Sandpoint Ranger District
Idaho Panhandle National Forests

NZ GIS team - 9/26/2003 sg


Project Boundary
Proposed Action
Decommission
(Some after project use)
Decommission
(Overgrown)
Put in Storage
Convert to ATV Trail
Upgrade
New Construction
Trail Improvement
Roads
Packsaddle Inventoried
Roadless Area
Private Ownership
Streams
All lines and figures
are approximate.
Lakeview
North Gold Creek
Cheer Creek
Kick Bush Gulch
West Gold Creek
Gold Creek
Chloride Gulch
2707B
278
113T
278D
1180
1358
1078
1180AUC
1017
1017B
2410A
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332C
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Chloride Bush
Ecosystem Restoration
Project
Transportation System
Management Proposal
Sandpoint Ranger District
Idaho Panhandle National Forests
NZ GIS team - 9/26/2003 sg

From:

TO: Sandpoint Ranger District
ATTN: A.J. Helgenberg
1500 Highway 2, Suite 110
Sandpoint, ID 83864

COMMENT FORM FOR THE PROPOSED CHLORIDE BUSH PROJECT

After reviewing the enclosed project proposal, take a moment to write down your thoughts, issues, ideas, or any information you may have relevant to this project. Please be as specific as possible. That way we can consider ways to modify our proposal to address your comments. If you have any questions about this proposal, please don't hesitate to call, write, e-mail or visit (e-mail address is ajhelgenberg@fs.fed.us). Please return this form or call in your comments right away. **Note: If we do not hear from you, we will remove your name from the mailing list for this project.**

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

Phone: _____

E-mail address: _____

_____ Please send me the draft environmental impact statement and summary on paper.
(Note: This will be several hundred pages long)

_____ Please send me documents in CD ROM format to view on a computer

_____ Please send me the summary only.

_____ Please send me information on the Gold Creek Watershed Mines cleanup.

_____ I would like to view information on your website. Please notify me by e-mail when it is available.

Fold in thirds, tape and affix postage